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ABSTRACT

Information is provided concerning the complexity of developing competency-based programs for members of service professions, such as teachers and media specialists, when there is little agreement about the qualifications and the behaviors required of the beginning professional. Section 1 discusses the qualities of a competent professional. Key issues are the lack of universal agreement among professional members and differences in philosophies as to whether a service professional's job is an art, a science, or a craft. Section 2 addresses the objections of critics to competency-based education, who argue that the essence of a service professional's job requires intuition and judgment which cannot be specified behaviorally. Section 3 considers the position of advocates, who undermine undefinable and unobservable mental ideas and feelings in their push for setting and maintaining standards of performance. Section 4 presents the controversial nature of competency-based education and the need for continuing debate in search of a resolution. Section 5 addresses the current status of competency-based requirements for school media professional certification. States which have already established such requirements, and publications about development and evaluation of competency-based education programs are listed. (LH)

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COMPETENCY-BASED EDUCATION FOR MEDIA PROFESSIONALS

AN ERIC FACT SHEET

SEP 81

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ERIC Clearinghouse on Information Resources
Syracuse, N.Y.

COMPETENCY-BASED EDUCATION
FOR MEDIA PROFESSIONALS
-An ERIC Fact Sheet-

Competency-based education is one of the current buzzwords of the educational world. Its lineage is out of scientific management by way of behavioral objectives and accountability. Simply put, it means educational programs must name the skills that the graduating student should have and guarantee that he or she actually has them.

It sounds simple and it is--for schools that prepare people for non-professional jobs. It becomes more complex when the task is to develop competency-based education for professional activities. Even here, however, for some fields (nursing is a good example) there is a high degree of agreement in the field as to the qualifications and the behaviors required of the beginning professional. The development of competency-based programs for such fields is arduous and time-consuming but relatively straight-forward.

What Constitutes a Competent Professional?

It is when one moves from these areas into fields like teaching and managing media centers that two problems arise: universal agreement and philosophical approach. For the first, there is diversity as to what constitutes a competent professional; the tasks that one professional performs may be quite unlike those of another. In considering philosophical approach, an ancient question reappears. Is teaching (or any other service work involving people) an art, a science, or a craft? An art by its nature is intuitive, individualistic and not easily (if at all) captured in competency-based terms. Science requires some generalizable and immutable (or at least highly reliable) statements that explain why things happen as they do and specify predictable relationships. A craft generally implies that there is a standard set of skills that can be described, demonstrated, and acquired by the average intelligent person.

What Do The Critics Say?

The critics of competency-based education often object to the implication that only jobs seen as crafts can be taught using the competency-based model. They argue that a service professional's job is more than a craft and less than a science and that the essence of the job requires intuition and judgment which can't be specified behaviorally. Only the craft aspect receives recognition in a competency-based program because only this way of viewing the job can be stated in competency-based terms. The intellectual processes that must go on can only be inferred from behavior, sometimes quite tenuously, other times not at all. Therefore it is simpler in a competency-based program to ignore these aspects and concentrate on behavior only. The affective element--all the emotional processes and psychic energy involved in commitment to the job--is equally omitted. If one has an active distaste for children yet can perform competently the skills involved in storytelling, he/she could become certified as a storyteller through a competency-based program.

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What Do the Advocates Say?

Advocates of the competency-based approach say these indefinable, nonobservable mental ideas and emotional feelings are somewhat irrelevant. It is only by behavior that we judge other people. If behavior can be properly and completely specified and demonstrated, that is all that can be reasonably required. Having the "right attitude" and indulging in only "right thinking" are beyond the scope of education either to specify or require. With competency-based education and certification programs, standards of performance can be set and maintained.

Can There Be a Resolution?

Pros and cons about the competency-based approach can and will be debated at length. Fashions in pedagogy will continue to change in accord with changes in the social, political and economic environment, as they should. Bureaucracy tends towards centralization and standardization and, as a result, will usually opt for behavioral requirements. Those who value the stalwart individual, the idiosyncrasies of different people, the peculiar style that each person brings to his job, will usually take the opposing position. The old question is always how much individuality an organization must have to be responsive to change and how much conformity is necessary for continuity. Most people will agree that a degree of conformity and specificity is both necessary and desirable; the determination of its extent is a proper subject for continuing debate.

What Is The Current Status?

Competency-based requirements for school media professional certification have been established in several states (Alabama, Georgia, Maryland, New York, North Carolina, Oregon, Texas, Utah, and Wisconsin) and in a number of colleges and universities. There has been no status survey of such programs. Kay Vandergrift, of the School of Library Science at Columbia University received the 1980 Association of American Library Schools research award for her study, "Educational Competency of the School Media Specialist: An Investigation into the Nature and Extent of Library School Responses." Most programs combine competencies in print and audiovisual media.

The process for developing programs is described in A Process for Developing a Competency-Based Educational Program for Media Professionals (ED 149 740). Actual competencies derived from major projects of the American Association of School Librarians (AASL) and the Association for Educational Communications and Technology (AECT) are published in Media Personnel in Education: A Competency Approach by Chisholm and Ely, Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1976.

The question of evaluation is addressed in Assessing the Competencies of Media Professionals: A Model for Determining Costs and Effectiveness (ED 179 250).

AECT published competencies for instructional development specialists and material design and production specialists in the December 1980 issue of Instructional Innovator. AASL uses competencies published in Behavioral Requirements Analysis Checklist: A Compilation of Competency-Based Job Functions and Task Statements for School Library Media Personnel (1973) and follows the Certification Model for Professional School Media Personnel published in 1976. The Canadian School Library Association developed Qualifications for School Librarians in 1979.

Prepared by Evelyn H. Daniel and Donald P. Ely September, 1981